Each summer, the Council of Educa-
tion Ministers of Canada offers bur-
sary courses in English and French
language immersion at many uni-
v ersities across the country. An
integral part of the courses is the
Troubadour Program, where musi-
cians and singers from one language-
group present a program of songs and
tunes from their own culture to mem-
bers of the other language-group.
Rika Ruebsaat and I participated in
this program in 1977 and 1978, and
were interested to hear that Marc
Lulham, one of the mainstays of the
Fredericton Folk Collective, and a
regular contributor to the Bulletin,
had taken part last year too. The
following is his report on that
summer's work.

Jon Bartlett

The idea was obvious enough: to
know and understand a people, one
must know and understand its songs.
It is encouraging to us followers and
performers of folk music that the co-
ordinators of the federal-provincial
Summer Language Bursary Pro-
gramme took this idea to heart. The
wisdom of the approach was affirm-
ed by our experience in the 1978 cam-
paign to promote bilingualism
among young Canadians.
Steve Peacock and myself spent four weeks of July and August of last year touring English language immersion programmes in Ontario and the four Atlantic provinces, visiting students at a total of ten university campuses. The programmes, coordinated by the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, offer six-week total immersion courses, in either French or English, at most universities across the country. Our own involvement came about when the New Brunswick Department of Education contacted me about the tour. I managed to persuade the department to include Steve in its proposal.

A musical collaboration had been brewing between us since we met in the fall of 1977 at a Folk Collective coffeehouse in Fredericton. Our backgrounds were quite different. My own musical experiences ranged from Baroque and Renaissance consort music to a love for playing the blues harp. Steve, on the other hand, was a classical and jazz guitarist. What we had in common was our interest in singing traditional and new folk music. Following numerous improvising sessions, we soon merged our song repertoires for public performances as well.

Our job was to visit each assigned university, combining our past experience in English teaching with our folksong repertoire, to present Francophones a glimpse of the songs, music and ways of life of various English-speaking groups in North America, with a heavy emphasis on Canadian content. We were to provide students with an alternative to regular classroom study and extracurricular activities, while working within the guidelines (if any) of the various programmes we visited.

Our aim was participation. We tried to perform a language-teaching function and give a good show at the same time, while minimizing any artistic compromises this dual approach could entail. Our own programme worked best if we had some exposure to our audiences before the coffeehouse or concert which we organized for the second night of our two-day visits.

On the first day at a given campus, we visited classrooms during the regularly-scheduled meeting times to spend about an hour with each small group of students. These visits were to be our only formal introduction to all of the students. We used that time to demonstrate in the English language the various musical instruments we carried around. We explained the backgrounds of certain songs representative of the areas we visited (such as ‘The Shantyman’s Life’ in New Brunswick and ‘She’s Like the Swallow’ in Newfoundland). We did phonetic and grammatical analyses of various recent Canadian and American folksongs to show students how today’s spoken and written word differs in certain geographical areas from the textbook English they were learning. We distributed words to certain songs, performed them, and practised different choruses of the lyrics with each classroom group for use at the performance the following evening. We made extensive use of the overhead projector both during classroom sessions and concerts. These strategies made audience participation in a new language a welcome reality.
No two universities were alike in their approach to English immersion teaching, and adaptability was a vital feature of our performance strategies. Performance format and content had to be regarded as variables, to be selected after an exposure to individual programmes, not before. Each programme had a distinct air about it, and where a coffeehouse format seemed best suited for our final Halifax performance, the best thing for the Ottawa Programme seemed to us to be a stage concert. As well, we had to be well-equipped to vary our material according to our audiences (what age-group and background?), choosing from a repertoire that included traditional songs as well as some mainstream Blues and Jazz material, modern folk tunes from throughout North America, and a classical repertoire ranging from sixteenth-century John Dowland to twentieth-century Jacques Ibert.

For example, York, Ottawa and Mount Allison Universities simultaneously ran programmes in English and French, and our audiences there tended to reflect this mixture. For this reason, we would on occasion perform traditional French Canadian material to turn our teaching function around, giving Anglophone students learning French an exposure to these worthwhile songs.

We became involved in music workshops, drama groups, and even individual language and musical instruction. Our aim of spending as much time as possible with participants in the Programme (at meals, on afternoon excursions, or even at the local bar) remained a priority throughout the tour, and made things enjoyable for all concerned.

The tour kept us quite busy, although some time remained for both of us to visit old friends and to check out several music spots along the way. Of particular note were a couple of good jam sessions with several young Toronto jazz players, and some pleasant evenings at the well-known jazz bars there. At the other end of the trip, we were treated to a grand tour of Saint John’s on our first-ever visit to Newfoundland, and spent many hours with Paul Mercer (a co-founder of the Folk Club there), who introduced us to the Folklore Department at Memorial University.

Our musical efforts as a team have continued. The Fredericton Folk Collective, our home club, lives on, and its annual Folk-on-the-Grass concert was one of our first performances in the area following our return. Other New Brunswick engagements and university events have kept us busy throughout the fall and winter.

We feel our contribution to the various English immersion programmes was quite useful, both in terms of second-language teaching and in the dissemination of folk music. In the latter sense, we saw young people thoroughly enjoying what was probably their first live contact with a musical heritage they could call their own, in these days of discotheques and massive recording industries.

Marc Lulham